DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 144 SO 027 507

AUTHOR Slattery, Patrick
TITLE Hermeneutics: A Phenomenological Aesthetic Reflection.
PUB DATE Apr 96
NOTE 54p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, April 8-14, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aesthetics; *Hermeneutics; Higher Education; Phenomenology; Self Concept; Self Congruence
IDENTIFIERS *Postmodernism

ABSTRACT

According to this document, the postmodern world needs a form of education which does not separate learning from its application to self, but encourages subjective experiencing of the world as self-encounter. The hermeneutical task is not a technical one, solved by logic, but is rather, an aesthetic journey of finding a sense of identity and personal meaning in experiences born in the midst of universal human struggles. The paper is organized in four sections. After an introductory section, the document presents: "Perspectives on Hermeneutics"; "Hermeneutics: A Phenomenological Aesthetic Investigation," which looks at five different approaches to hermeneutics; and "Aesthetics in Hermeneutics," in which phenomenological aesthetics for hermeneutics in education is advocated; the implication being that transformation and learning would be stimulated by a sense of connectedness and awareness of future possibilities. Contains 52 references. (MM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 410 144

Hermeneutics:

A Phenomenological Aesthetic Reflection

A Paper Presented at the

American Educational Research Association

Annual Meeting

New York City, NY

April 8-14, 1996

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Patrick Slattery
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

by

Patrick Slattery

Associate Professor of Education

Ashland University, Bixler Hall 329

Ashland, OH 44805 USA

419-289-5376 (Office)

pslatter@ashland.edu

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Session 35.17 "Hermeneutics and Subjectivity"

Sponsored by Division B and the Religion and Education SIG

Diana B. Hiatt, Session Chair
and
Outgoing Chair of Religion and Education SIG of AERA

SO 027 507

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

This paper proposes a theory of the interrelationship of hermeneutics and subjectivity that may move the discussion of schooling practices beyond methodological and structuralist principles of interpretation to a hermeneutic experience in education--an *Erfahrung* as Hegel expressed in his *Phenomenology*. This experience parallels the sequencing of things that befall you when you travel. The journey is utterly unknown ahead of time, as each journey is made for the first time. This is the concept of experience that guides not only Hegel's *Phenomenology*, but also philosophies of *Bildung*, the understanding of reading and interpretation in Gadamer, and this proposal for subjectivity and interpretation. This is distinct from empirical accounts of experience because *Bildung* allows for self-consciousness and self-formation, not in a structuralist sense of invariant constructs of human consciousness, but in a poststructural sense of emergent, ambiguous, tentative, and eclectic identities.

Postmodern hermeneutic interpretation--an apparent oxymoron--is possible, I believe, if grounded in aesthetic experience and attentive to the Aristotelian sense of *applicato*. Our postmodern world desperately needs a form of education as *Bildung* which does not separate learning from its application to oneself (as happens in technical, managerial, and behavioral approaches to education), but encourages subjectivity and lived world experience as forms of self-encounter where teachers and students

are aesthetically present to subject matter rather than assuming they possess it. Possessing subject matter perpetuates the notion of inert ideas that Whitehead adamantly resisted in his process education. I assume that schooling as the inculcation of inert ideas will continue unabated until an experience--*Bildung*--and application--*applicato*--of hermeneutics and subjectivity in the educational process emerges. This paper promotes the emergence of such an aesthetic sensibility in the hermeneutic process.

The attempt to make sense of the tragedies and uncertainties of contemporary society often paralyzes human persons in fear, despair, malaise, and hopelessness. David G. Smith (1991) locates hermeneutics in such social struggles, linking social upheaval and the need for interpretation. The hermeneutical task is not a technical one, solved by logic; rather, for Smith and others, it is born in the midst of human struggles--or experience as described above--and enables us to ask "what makes it possible for us to speak, think, and act in the ways we do" (p. 188). Smith sees the aim of interpretation not in an infinite regress or relativization, "but human freedom, which finds its light, identity, and dignity in those few brief moments when one's lived burdens can be shown to have their source in too limited view of things" (p. 189). Further, according to Smith, the significance of the hermeneutic imagination may be to problemitize the hegemony of dominant culture in order to engage it transformatively. We see hermeneutics as both phenomenological

and political in this context. It is also a search for subjectivity, as William Reynolds (1989) contends when he proposes that a growth of self-understanding emerges from the fusion of horizons with texts. This, for Reynolds, becomes a quest to find our critical voice and sense of identity.

Education has the potential to participate in the quest for critical voice, social justice, and the transformation of despair--"this fear and trembling, the sickness unto death" described by Kierkegarrd. However, as Peter McLaren warns, education is a "contested terrain" that challenges singular hermeneutic interpretations or methodologies. Rather than opting out of the social, political, and religious debates as Stephen Arons (1983) proposes in *Compelling Belief*, I encourage educators to enter the cultural debates with an eye toward justice, compassion, liberation, understanding, and ecological sustainability. While I will challenge the unexamined neo-Marxism of some critical theorists, there is another alternative through subjectivity and hermeneutics.

Unlike Arons who sees the political and religious debates as "unresolvable parochial conflicts" and public schools as obsolete in such a climate, I look for an alternative mode of inquiry and a way of affirming subjectivity that will transcend these irresolvable conflicts and the deeply entrenched parochialism, intolerance, violence, malaise, hopelessness, and anti-aesthetic world view that Suzanne Langer (1957) called "a society of formless emotion." Through subjectivity and hermeneutics, I

believe that a penetrating and vibrant aesthetic and eschatological sensibility is possible. There are emerging strands of poststructural and postmodern theories that I find helpful in explicating this sensibility.

Modernity is characterized by a search for an underlying and unifying truth and certainty that can render the world, experiences, events, the self, and curriculum as coherent and meaningful. The modern quest has failed; postmodern sensibilities are emerging. Postmodernity is marked by a view of the human and the cosmos that is irreducible and irrevocably pluralistic, existing in a multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority, with no horizontal or vertical order, either in actuality or in potency. In this environment knowledge is contested, constructed, and emerging. The self is decentered and multifaceted. Subjectivity must be reexamined from these poststructural and postmodern perspectives.

At the root of modern scientific attitudes is a desire to know the world through a language which represents reality transparently and truly--where meaning is present to thought undistorted by language's fictions and where the world can "speak" itself with absolute certainty. This modern certitude is extended to self-presence in the sense that knowing the self becomes the goal of consciousness. Traditional hermeneutics provided the authority and certitude that encouraged the modern quest. In the tradition of Descartes, the thinking and rational subject became immune to deception. Hence, a traditional

hermeneutics sought certitude of interpretation through a voyeuristic anthropology stripped of subjectivity.

Postmodernism shatters Cartesian certainty. Freud's introduction of the notion of the unconscious, and his disciple Lacan's reformulation of Descarte's Cognito as "I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think," introduced the possibility of the decentered subject where the subject of consciousness--the reasoning and thinking transparent self--is displaced by the opaque subject of the unconscious. Jung expanded on Freud's unconscious to the realm of archetypes and dreams, thus introducing a new hermeneutic of understanding the self.

In sum, what we see is a multiplicity of conscious and unconscious interactions revealing the self as complex, opaque, and changing rather than fixed and rational. Mastery learning, rational accountability, canonical certitude, and metanarrative interpretations are undermined by a hermeneutic of subjectivity.

The implications of a postmodern hermeneutics of subjectivity is most clearly articulated by Jacques Lacan who agrees with Freud that subjectivity is not constituted by consciousness. Lacan emphasizes the importance of unconsciousness and of desire as the locus of human actions, but beyond a Freudian biological determinism. Desire is always social and intersubjective--a hermeneutic circle rather than a hermeneutic certainty. Lacan provides a way out of determinism through desire and intersubjectivety. It is here that a

postmodern hermeneutic and an eschatological sensibility can engage the self. Hope becomes possible in the midst of malaise and fear. One reading of Lacan allows psychology to move radically beyond both scientific and humanistic positions. The self is neither an organismic subject nor a subject of rationality. It is neither pre-given nor transparent, neither self-transparent not unitary. Lacan writes that "the self is no longer a unified collection of thoughts and feelings, but is decentered, marked by an essential split" (Benvenuto and Kennedy, 1986, p. 18). This reminds me of the essential tension between the "already" and the "not yet" in Ernst Bloch's (1986) eschatology. A postmodern hermeneutic of subjectivity forms the basis for this new understanding of both the human person and society as a contested terrain of ironic and conflicting positions.

We find ourselves in this contested terrain of ironic and conflicting positions in contemporary schooling. A dogmatic and rational understanding of subjectivity and hermeneutics, rooted in the theology of Origin, Augustine, and Aquinas, lingers in the modern political and religious hierarchy. Alternatives are being explored which offer fresh yet contested terrains of subjectivity. One alternative is a phenomenological aesthetic hermeneutic.

Perspectives on Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has a history of serious scholarship in Biblical interpretation and nineteenth century philosophical attempts to deal with the problem of how we understand the complex actions of human beings. Contemporary hermeneutics, as derived from the phenomenological philosophers Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl, acknowledges that discourse is an essential constituent element of textual understanding. Understanding sets free what is hidden from view by layers of tradition, prejudice, and even conscious evasion. While these prejudices must be acknowledged as a starting point for hermeneutic inquiry for Hans-Georg Gadamer, hermeneutic interpretation, for Heidegger, was moving toward understanding as emancipation from tradition, prejudice, and evasion.

Hermeneutics, in its broadest formulation, is the theory of interpreting oral traditions, verbal communications, and aesthetic products. Aristotle used hermeneutics in the title of one of his works (*Peri Hermenia*), and there was a school of interpretation in ancient Alexandria. In early Christian communities hermeneutics referred to the criteria for textual interpretation in order to establish normative religious and legal community practices. The Greek *Hermeneuenin* (to interpret) referred to Hermes, the winged messenger of the Greek gods who explained the decisions of the gods to other gods and to mortal humans. Hermes conveyed messages of both clarity and ambiguity.

Hilly Bernard (1994) explains:

> Perhaps this [clarity and ambiguity] was a deliberate contrivance on the part of the heavenly rulers, an act attempting a representation of the complexity of language, in order to keep their subordinates in a state of humble submission. The hermeneutic tradition confronts the issue of complexity, ambiguity, interpretation, intentionality, and meaning, and asserts the inescapable subjective in human inquiry. As such, it serves as a rejection of the scientific philosophy and its premise of an objective reality "out there" to be discovered using a prescribed methodology. This mono-methodological approach of science stresses causal relationships, while the quest of the hermeneuticist is the development of theories of understanding through the interpretation of language. (p. 10)

Bernard's concise summary of hermeneutic inquiry is consistent with the approach to postmodern interpretation in many contemporary educational discourses.

Hermes, in addition to explaining and interpreting the messages of the gods, was also a trickster. Many contemporary educators revel in the irony that the official messenger of the gods was also a cunning deceiver! This reminds us that layers of meaning, prejudice, and intention surround all curricular artifacts, thus necessitating a hermeneutical study to expose not

only the irony of deception, but also the implications of historical analysis. Historical, textual, aesthetic, and autobiographical interpretation in the postmodern era all acknowledge this double-edged dimension of clarity and ambiguity in hermeneutics. However, unlike modern empiricists who demand unbiased certainty and scientific proof, the irony of interpretation is celebrated by postmodern scholars who recognize that ambiguity is integral to the human condition and the natural world. Contemporary hermeneutics affirms the primacy of contested subjective understanding over inert objective knowledge and conceives of understanding as an ontological (study of being) problem rather than an epistemological (study of knowledge) problem. Therefore, Hermes the messenger and deceiver becomes the model *par excellence* of interpretation in the postmodern era. Many scholars describe hermeneutics as the art of interpretation. Others prefer to describe hermeneutics as a methodology. Several forms of interpretive inquiry in educational research explore such understanding: phenomenology, critical theory, semiotics, post-structuralism, heuristics, autobiography, aesthetics, and ethnography.

Reflecting on interpretive inquiry, David Jardine (1992) writes,

> The returning of life to its original difficulty is a returning of the possibility of the living Word. It is a return to the essential generativity of human life, a sense of life in which there is always something left to say, with

> all the difficulty, risk, and ambiguity that such generativity entails. Hermeneutic inquiry is thus concerned with the ambiguous nature of life itself. (p. 119)

Hermeneutics is also concerned with the ambiguous and ironic dimensions of interpretation in education: an unexpected question triggers an exciting or provocative tangent; the changing moods and emotions of individuals create a unique and often perplexing life-world in classrooms; the same methodology is not always successful with every group of students; atmospheric changes in the weather alter the atmosphere of the school. Teachers cannot predict the ambiguous and ironic nature of life itself, especially in the classroom, and hermeneutics as an investigation into the ambiguous nature of being and knowledge now inform and enrich contemporary education. Thus, along with David G. Smith (1991), I will argue that all educational discourses are interpretive and hermeneutic endeavors. Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida (1989) have debated this point in the book *Dialogue and Deconstructionism*.

In this milieu, the focus of hermeneutics will shift from inert and objective data to the community of interpreters working together in mutually corrective and mutually collaborative efforts to underestand texts and contexts. The entire educational experience is now open to reflection because everything requires recursive interpretation. Without this perspective, Hermes the trickster would continue to have the opportunity to deceive educators.

As a final caveat, educators must remember that hermeneutic inquiry has the potential of infuriating and inciting those committed to traditional authoritative, behavioral, and bureaucratic structures. David G. Smith (1991) has written the following insight into Hermes and the hermeneutic tradition as a warning:

> Hermes, as well as being the deliverer of messages between the gods and from gods to mortals on earth, was known for a number of other qualities as well, such as eternal youthfulness, friendliness, prophetic power, and fertility. In a sense, all of these features are at work in the hermeneutic endeavor to this day, as the practice of interpretation attempts to show what is at work in different disciplines and, in the service of human generativity and good faith, is engaged in the mediation of meaning. There is one further aspect of Hermes that may be worth noting, namely, his imprudence....Students of hermeneutics should be mindful that their interpretations could lead them into trouble with "authorities." (p. 187)

Hermeneutics can be dangerous, for it uncovers, interprets, clarifies, deconstructs, and challenges models and methods that have been enshrined in the sacred canons for centuries.

Hermeneutics:

A Phenomenological Aesthetic Investigation

Mark Twain once said "Your judgment may be flawed if your imagination is not in focus." I would like to explore the imagination from the perspective of phenomenology and propose that aesthetics is an essential element of a constructive postmodern understanding of hermeneutics. Maxine Greene (1978) has been passionate in her call for "wide- awakenness" in education. She writes that "laking wide-awakenness...individuals are likely to drift, to act on impulses of expediency" (p. 43). With Greene, I observe too much expediency at the expense of wide-awakenness in the schooling process. I am an advocate of encountering the arts--in the broadest sense of the term--to create aesthetic moments capable of elevating the mundane to generative experiences of freedom and liberation. In her recent book, *Releasing the Imagination*, Greene (1995) writes, "Consciousness always has an imaginative phase, and imagination, more than any other capacity, breaks through the inertia of habit. When nothing intervenes to overcome such inertia, it joins with the sense of repetitiveness and uniformity to discourage active learning" (p.21). John Dewey contends that all possibilities reach us through the imagination. Dewey (1934) writes "The aims and ideals that move us are generated though imagination. But they are not made out of imaginary stuff...they are made out of the world of physical and social experience" (p.

x). Is it possible to re/focus the imagination, re/envision interpretation, and generate experiences in education that will allow us to suspend flawed judgments and modern sedimented perceptors?

I am concerned that contemporary approaches to hermeneutics are not sufficiently committed to aesthetics, subjectivity, and imagination, and thus are ineffective in overcoming Greene's "inertia of habit." Thus, contemporary hermeneutics in both its conservative and critical application--as well as its deconstructive philosophical positions--is not attentive to the essential role that aesthetics plays in transformative educational experience. While Gadamer has successfully moved the understanding of hermeneutics in the direction of the aesthetic, I am impatient with his "fusion of horizons." I seek a more dramatic break with traditional hermeneutics without the rupture created by radical deconstructionism or the hostility created by critical theory. I appreciate efforts by contemporary scholars to mediate this contentious terrain, especially the mythopoetic and cosmological proposal by Nelson Haggerson and Andrea Bowman (1992), the moderate hermeneutics in the spirit of Gadamer by Shaun Gallagher (1992), the emphasis on social critique in hermeneutics by David G. Smith (1991), the inderterminancy of interpretation in lived time by Glen Hudak (1995), the productive process of contextualizing interpretation through hermeneutic listening proposed by Stephanie Kimball and Jim Garrison (n.d.) and Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989), the conversing dialogue of

Bildung proposed by David Blacker (1993), and the integration of the various strands of hermeneutics using Ricouer's phenomenology by Josef Bleicher (1980), among many others. I would like to add my voice to this ongoing dialogue and propose a greater emphasis on phenomenological aesthetic experiences in the educational process.

It is a search for self-reflective subjectivity, transformative aesthetic experiences, "wide-awaken" imagination, and social justice that undergirds my hermeneutic proposal. Like Greene, Dewey, Eisner, and many other educational theorists, I prioritize the arts in this process. Following from William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet's (1976) early work describing the synthetical moment in autobiographical research, and recent work by Aoki, Van Manen and others with a phenomenological focus, I believe that education will benefit from a new understanding of hermeneutics that emphasizes aesthetics and poststructural notions of subjectivity as the basis for exploring the process of creating synthetical, imaginative, and transformative experiences.

This will be accomplished by re/connecting hermeneutics to autobiographical inquiry, narrative research, phenomenological lived experience, participatory ethnographic study, and other forms of qualitative research--all grounded in a the primacy of aesthetics. With Nietzsche (1968), I agree that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art--for it is only as aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are

eternally justified" (p. 52). This does not negate, as naive critics often contend, a concern for ethics (Morris and Slattery, 1995). Aesthetics and social justice are thus inseparable in my estimation.

In the process of understanding hermeneutics from the perspective of aesthetics and subjectivity, while remaining committed to issues of justice, compassion, and ecological sustainability, a central questions that many of us are struggling with is "how does qualitative research promote these values, and what does interpretation mean for qualitative research?" Eisner (1994) proposes in his book *The Educational Imagination* that we must shift our focus from statistical reliability and validity to what he terms referential adequacy--experiencing an object or situation in a new or more adequate way--and structural corroboration--linking the parts to cohesive whole. Some critics have found Eisner's proposal for educational coinneusseurship to be unverifiable. I find that most of these critics are rooted in a traditional notion of hermeneutics that seeks to separate the knower from the know by stripping subjectivity from the interpretive process. It is these same critics who cannot understand the inextricable bond of aesthetics and ethics.

Before moving to my proposal for hermeneutics as a phenomenological aesthetic experience, I would like to delineate five understandings of hermeneutics summarized from the work of Shaun Gallagher, Nelson Haggerson, Andrea Bowman, and Joseph

Bleicher. I would like to situate my proposal for an educational hermeneutic within the concise frameworks provided by these scholars.

Traditional Theological Hermeneutics is the empirical science of interpretation of canonical religious texts within their historical context by a magesterium intent on defining the meaning of the text. Exegetes, with a concern for linguistic and grammatical accuracy, are considered experts who establish the criteria for authoritative text interpretation.

Hermeneutic inquiry was almost exclusively empirical prior to the nineteenth century. As a science of interpretation, traditional theological hermeneutics was originally concerned with understanding religious texts, canonical scriptures, and non-canonical writings within their own historical, cultural, and social milieu. The difficulty of such interpretive tasks is immense, postmodernists would contend impossible, because the worldview of contemporary societies cannot replicate ancient cosmologies and subjectivities in which the original text was produced. Additionally, as Gadamer has warned, attempting to conduct a hermeneutic study assuming that subjectivities and prejudices of the hermeneut can be eradicated is impossible.

Early Greek and Jewish thinkers were concerned with appropriate interpretation of the Torah, the prophets, and the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. The allegorical method was employed to understand linguistic and grammatical components of scriptural texts to appropriate this meaning within

the wider spiritual framework of the time. Werner Jeanrond (1988) explains: "Philo of Alexandria united the Jewish and Greek hermeneutical traditions and developed the thesis that an interpretation should disclose the text's spiritual sense on the basis of an explanation of the text's literal sense" (p. 462). This concept of hermeneutics expanded with the influence of Christian interpreters who sought to confirm their belief in salvation in Jesus Christ. Hebrew scriptures were interpreted in the light of the Christian faith in Jesus, arguing that the promises to Israel were fulfilled. The Christian hermeneut, Origen, emphasized the need for text interpretation in both the historical-grammatical (literal) sense and the spiritual sense so as to provide access and understanding for every interpreter of sacred writings. Following Origen, Augustine developed his philosophy of language where the "sign" points to the "thing," a concept that is understood differently by postmodern semioticians.

Semiotics, the study of the meaning of language and the relationship between signs, symbols, and historical representation, critiques hidden assumptions, uncovers excluded meanings, and deconstructs linguistic interpretations. Both texts and contexts, agents and objects of meaning, social structures and forces, and their complex interrelationships together constitute the irreducible object of semiotic analysis. Robert Hodge and Gunter Kress (1988) explain:

The term 'semiotics' is relatively new for many people,

> and a number of conceptual difficulties continue to attach to its use. Semiotics has been defined as 'the science of the life of signs in society' (Saussure 1974). So defined it has a scope which is breathtaking in its simplicity and in its comprehensiveness. ...Semiotics offers the promise of a systematic, comprehensive and coherent study of communications phenomena as a whole, not just instances of it....'Mainstream semiotics' emphasizes structures and codes, at the expense of functions of social uses of semiotic systems....It stresses system and product, rather than speakers and writers or other participants in semiotic activity as connected and inter*acting* in a variety of ways in concrete social contexts. It [traditional semiotics] attributes power to meaning, instead of meaning to power. It dissolves boundaries within the field of semiotics, but tacitly accepts an impenetrable wall cutting off semiosis from society, and semiotics from social and political thought. Many...have rejected semiotics because of such objections. (pp. 1-2)

Hodge and Kress do not reject semiotics, and offer an approach to interpretation that addresses the problem of social meaning as well as ways that meaning is constituted. Bowers and Flinders (1990) call this critical semiotics, "where attention is given to cultural conventions or codes, that in turn, generate the signs

that serve as the basic unit of communication" (p. 22). Bowers and Flinders draw on a number of areas of inquiry concerned with different aspects of the culture-language-thought connection that are related to the judgments that teachers face as they attempt to direct and orchestrate communication in the classroom. Bowers and Flinders (1990) conclude, "In one sense, these processes, which constitute the symbolic medium of the classroom that teachers and students must continually interpret and give meaning to, are interrelated" (p. 23).

In this sense, semiotics, like hermeneutics, is concerned with interpretation of texts, contexts, or artifacts. It provides the possibility of analysis of contemporary social problems and the possibility of explaining the processes and structures through which meaning is constituted. This emerging understanding of critical semiotics challenges Augustine's literal meaning of signs. In postmodern semiotics the "sign" may point to nothing or it may point to many "things" simultaneously, and in every case the culture-language-thought interrelationship must be interpreted. Additionally, the meaning of power and the processes through which meaning is constructed are becoming the focus of semiotic as well as hermeneutic analysis in the postmodern era. Let us now return to our investigation of the development of hermeneutics.

Like Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, author of the *Summa Theologiae*, emphasized the literal sense of language. Aquinas became the definitive authority on textual interpretation, and

since the thirteenth century, Aquinas was presumed to support the literal interpretation as the accurate bearer of truth. Jeanrond (1988), echoing centuries of Thomistic theology, writes:

> According to Aquinas, appropriate interpretation is the task of dogmatic theology while exegesis concentrates on the purely philological task of preparing the text for theological understanding. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the ultimate decision on the criteria and the validity of results of biblical interpretation remained the prerogative of the teaching office (Magisterium) of the Roman Catholic Church. (p. 463)

A major controversy concerning the status of Thomistic hermeneutics has occurred in the 1990s. Matthew Fox, a Dominican priest (until his removal in 1993), as was Aquinas, published in 1992 a new interpretation of the works of Thomas Aquinas entitled *Sheer Joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on Creation Spirituality*. Fox had already been silenced for one year by the Vatican in Rome prior to the publication of this book, primarily as the result of an ongoing debate over the doctrinal purity of Fox's "creation spirituality" and "original blessings." In his work Fox emphasizes a cosmological vision of creation with the ontological goodness of human beings, rather than their sinfulness, as primary. Charles Jencks (1992) comments:

> The lesson Fox draws from many such recent discoveries is that the universe is a fairly benign place, with a countless set of 'gifts.' These show Christians have

> had some priorities wrong: they should acknowledge not just original sin, which has been bearing down and repressing consciousness for sixteen centuries, but 'original blessing.' Although there are indeed accidents, suffering, real evil and constant warfare (creativity can be as much negative as positive) we can clarify from our existence here the answer to a perennially important question. It is one that Einstein posed: is the universe a fundamentally good place, should we be optimistic? The answer, of course, hangs in the balance and depends on how we treat the earth and ourselves, as well as the other endangered species. (p. 36)

In developing his postmodern vision, Fox (1992) relies heavily on the hermeneutic interpretation of Hebrew and Christian scriptures. And now, with the publication of *Sheer Joy*, Fox has produced a hermeneutical narrative study which reevaluates, and possibly replaces, seven centuries of Christian hermeneutics in the Thomistic tradition.

Fox begins by claiming that Thomas Aquinas was not a Thomist. Fox (1992) asserts: "I descholasticize Aquinas by interviewing him. I...ask him our questions and allow him access to our pressing issues in spirituality. This is important because the questions that preoccupied his thirteenth-century contemporaries are of course not always the issues that concern us" (p. 2). Fox explains that his interview method is designed

to uncover the "person behind the analytic mind" so as to interpret the meaning of philosophical categories such as "evil" or "morality" for contemporary society. Fox offers new interpretations of Aquinas' biblical commentaries to move beyond the scholastic methodology that typified Aquinas' other works. Fox (1992) writes: "Following the inner logic of the biblical text, he [Aquinas] is free to make connections, let his creative genius work, and allow his heart as well as his head to speak. Here his passion often comes tumbling out--especially when he is speaking of his favorite love, wisdom" (p. 3). This historical perspective of the dual role of hermeneutic interpretation as both analytic and intuitive confounds scholastic theologians, and by way of extrapolation it also confounds those committed to modern curriculum development methods and materials. The irony of the double-coded discourse of multiple understandings challenges the binary logic of modernity and the absolute metanarratives of the Enlightenment project. This dual role of hermeneutics accepts the irony of apparent contradictions in interpretation and deconstructs traditional theological hermeneutics.

Fox is working to move beyond the modern era's fix on hermeneutical interpretation as mechanistic and literalistic. "Enlightenment prejudices have often been employed in interpreting Aquinas over the centuries" (Fox, 1992, p. 7). Fox terms his creation spirituality "postmodern" (p. 7) in the constructive rather than deconstructive sense, and he employs

hermeneutics to recover premodern wisdom embedded in the Biblical treatises written by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century in order to bring those insights to a contemporary, postmodern cosmology. Fox concludes that some Thomists, while frequently rejecting much of Descartes and modern philosophy in argumentation, in fact, have often succumbed to rationalist tendencies in vigorous attempts to prove Aquinas was scientific and respectably rational. This has often limited them to the scholastic texts of Aquinas and the linear thinking of scholasticism. "I believe Aquinas deserves--and we today require from Aquinas--a nonlinear celebration of his amazingly mystical and intellectual thought" (Fox, 1992, p. 12). As students of curriculum, we can see in Matthew Fox's interpretation of Aquinas' Biblical commentaries a hermeneutical process that seeks to reevaluate scholastic theology. This is the hermeneutics of a double-edged sword that offers fresh insights for some but anxiety for others. Regardless of the ways that the work of Matthew Fox will be judged by scholars in years to come, he has "raised the ante" in the debate over traditional theological hermeneutical interpretation. This underlines the theological origins of hermeneutics.

Conservative Philosophical Hermeneutics is grounded in the tradition of protestant theologian Frederich Schleirmacher and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey. It has inspired educational reformers such as E. D. Hirsch. These theorists would maintain that through correct methodology and hard work, the interpreter

can break out of his or her historical epoch and subjectivities in order to understand an author's original intention. The hermeneut can also transcend historical limitations in order to reach universal or objective truth. The intention of hermeneutics is to reproduce the meaning or intention of the text. Well defined methodologies guide the anthropological and historical search for objectivity.

While the literalistic practice of Biblical interpretation in the Thomistic scholastic tradition continued to dominate through the Protestant Reformation, the emphasis on the scriptures during the Reformation promoted reading and understanding biblical texts by individual believers rather than papal officials. Thus, the Protestant Reformation had the effect of deemphasizing the interpretation of scripture by the Roman Magisterium. Following the Enlightenment, hermeneutics was reevaluated by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who rejected all formal, extra-textual authorities as illegitimate imposition on individual acts of understanding. Schleiermacher's work discredited special theological or legal hermeneutics. Schleiermacher explained, "Rather, every written text must be understood both in terms of its individual sense (psychological understanding) and in terms of the linguistic procedures through which this sense is achieved (grammatical understanding). Hermeneutics is now understood as the art of understanding the sense of the text. Allegorical interpretation is ruled out, the text must be allowed to speak for itself" (quoted in Jeanrond,

1988, p. 463, emphasis in original).

Paul Ricoeur (1981) has contended that a movement of deregionalization began with the attempt to extract a general problem from the activity of interpretation which is each time engaged in different texts, and "the discernment of this central and unitary problematic is the achievement of Schleiermacher" (p. 45). Before Schleiermacher a philology (historical linguistic study) of classical texts and a literalistic exegesis (critical analysis) of sacred texts predominated. After Schleiermacher, it became clear that the hermeneutical process required that the individual interpreter must discern the operations which are common to these two traditional branches of hermeneutics, philology and exegesis. However, the goal of universal truth remained intact in conservative philosophical hermeneutics even though the possibility of the value of the individual interpreter began to gain ascendancy in philosophical hermeneutics.

Contextual Hermeneutics [or **Moderate Hermeneutics** for Shaun Gallagher (1992)] recognized historical and subjective conditions as essential in the interpretive process. Interpreters are now understood to move within a hermeneutical circle that requies the specification of historical conditions in textual interpretation. Gadamer (1975) calls attention to preunderstandings which underpin interpretation. Gadamer terms the condition and the perspectives of interpreters their "horizons" and the act of understanding the sense of a text "the fusion of horizons." Through this fusion of horizons the interpreter enters the

tradition of the text, and thus shares in the text's particular representation of truth. Gadamer (1976) writes about relationships in the hermeneutic circle that transcend the "technical sign-systems" of the modern age:

> Each [person] is at first a kind of linguistic circle, and these linguistic circles come in contact with each other, merging more and more. Language occurs once again, in vocabulary and grammar as always, and never without the inner infinity of the dialogue that is in process between every speaker and his [or her] partner. That is the fundamental dimension of hermeneutics. (p. 17)

Gadamer concludes by stating that genuine speaking, which has something to say and therefore is not based on prearranged signals, but rather seeks words that reach the other human person, is the universal human task. This is the hermeneutic circle which educators must enter in the postmodern era.

Although Gadamer's hermeneutics has been criticized by some for his refusal to allow for methodological controls of the act of interpretation, many education scholars in the 1990s rely on Gadamer to support their critique of narrow instrumental views of schooling. Truth, they contend, cannot be collapsed into methods, the mainstay of the traditional approach to modern hermeneutics. [It is interesting to note that Gadamer's (1960/1975) major work, *Truth and Method*, is interpreted in various ways. Gadamer delighted in the confusion of his title:

"Ambiguity is the secret to a good title and promptly some reviewers would comment correspondingly. Some would say that the book discussed the method for finding truth, others said that I claimed that there was no method for finding truth" (cited in Misgeld and Nicholson, 1992, p. 64)] For Gadamer, we must approach texts with our preunderstandings, suspend our prejudices, and engage in dialogue. David Blacker (1993), for example, argues that Gadamer's effort involves a reconstruction of the humanist sense of education as *Bildung*, which emphasizes what is done to individuals rather than what individual persons actually do. Blacker (1993) writes:

> To make the notion of *Bildung* more concrete, then, Gadamer recasts it as a dialogue between interpreter and tradition in which the latter is experienced as a Thou. This point must be stressed: he is not saying that individuals like teachers and students in every case ought to engage in an intersubjective give-and-take....Accordingly, sharing in this historically-constituted conversation does not mean that I experience tradition as the opinion of some person or other, but that I am able to enter into it as into a game made up of myself and other persons but not reducible to any one of us. In this edifying tradition-forming, revising and conversing dialogue taking place in language--Hegelian Spirit conversing with itself--arises *Bildung*, which I see as the

> normative dimension of philosophical hermeneutics. (p. 7)

Traditional theological hermeneutics and conservative philosophical hermeneutics, as we have seen above, will insist on a normative methodology. However, this normative methodology is not Blacker's conversing dialogue. The traditional normative methodology is determined by an external authority. In contrast, contextual or moderate hermeneutics will validate text interpretation that arises from the dialogue of individuals working within the context of a community circle where the other, whether human person, tradition, or artifact, is experienced as a "Thou" and not an "it." For Gadamer, the hermeneutic circle is used to facilitate understanding and open up "possibilities," while the traditional technical approach to hermeneutics is seen as dehumanizing.

Paul Ricoeur (1981) takes a different approach in his important work *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* where he argues that the first understanding of the sense of the text must be validated through some explanatory procedures to ensure the sense of the text. Ricoeur contends that the movement from a structuralist science to a structuralist philosophy is bound to fail. John Thompson, translator of Ricoeur, explains that structuralism, insofar as it precludes the possibility of self-reflection, can never establish itself as a philosophy:

> An order posited as unconscious can never, to my mind, be more than a stage abstractly separated from an understanding

> of the self by itself; order in itself is thought located outside itself. A genuinely reflective philosophy must nevertheless be receptive to the structuralist method, specifying its validity as an abstract and objective moment in the understanding of self and being. This imperative forms one of the principal guidelines for Ricoeur's recent work on the theory of language and interpretation. (Cited in Ricoeur, 1981, p. 10)

Ricoeur's interest evolved, in part, from his initial efforts to formulate a concrete ontology infused with the themes of freedom, finitude, and hope at the Sorbonne as a graduate student with Gabriel Marcel in the 1930s. However, Ricoeur became intent on discovering a more rigorous and systematic method than he found in Marcel. The phenomenology of Edmund Husserl provided this method, and in turn led to the development of a reflective philosophy disclosing authentic subjectivity for understanding human existence. At the same time, Ricoeur was convinced that necessity and freedom were integral aspects of that existence. Finally, he turned to the problem of language, and here he engaged hermeneutics. Ricoeur (1981) explains:

> I propose to organize this problematic [the historicity] of human experience and communication in and through distance around five themes: (1) the realization of language as a discourse; (2) the realization of discourse as a structured work; (3) the relation of speaking to writing in discourse and in the works of discourse; (4) the work of discourse as

> the projection of a world; (5) discourse and the work of discourse as the mediation of self-understanding. Taken together, these features constitute the criteria of textuality. (p. 132)

Ricoeur thus moves the hermeneutical process beyond traditional theological and conservative philosophical understandings to a more general level of human understanding.

Ricoeur's theory of hermeneutical understanding was judged as politically naive by contemporary German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1970). Habermas insisted that "only a critical and self-critical attitude toward interpretation could reveal possible systematic distortions in human communication and their impact on our interpretive activity" (quoted in Jeanrond, 1988, p. 463). Thus, in its contextual or moderate form, hermeneutics is faced with three interrelated concerns: understanding, explanation, and critical assessment. The latter implies that a community of interpreters must work to unmask ideological distortions, limited "objective" interpretations, and analysis of the meaning of the text. This community of interpreters opens hermeneutics to the postmodern discussion that includes a relational dimension that is mutually critical.

Shaun Gallagher (1992) uses Gadamer and Ricoeur to demonstrate that no method can guarantee an absolutely objective interpretation of an author's work because readers are conditioned by the prejudices of their historical existence, prejudices which are embedded in language. While language does

enable some access to textual meaning, it prevents absolute access to textual meaning. Interpreters never achieve complete or objective understanding since they are limited by historical circumstance, ideology, and language.

This is a clear contradiction of traditional theological and conservative philosophical hermeneutics which seek the promise of objectivity and worry about the contamination of subjectivity in the interpretive process. Contextual (or moderate) hermeneutics would respond that, since interpretation has a dialogical character, it is not purely subjective. Gallagher (1992) writes, "Interpretation involves creativity and not just reproduction; the reader participates, just as much as the author does, in putting together the meaning, or in the case of poetry or literature, in creating the aesthetic experience" (p. 10). Here Gallagher reflects my view that creativity and aesthetics provide a context for understanding interpretation. This is an integral dimension of my proposal for aesthetic interpretation.

Poststructural Hermeneutics (or **Radical Hermeneutics** for Gallagher) is inspired by Nietzsche and Heidegger and practiced by deconstructionists like Derrida and Foucault. Here interpreting and reading is more a case of playing or dancing or ruminating--in the etymological sense of the Latin *ruminere*--rather than application of methods. Interpretation requires playing with words of the text rather than using them to find truth in or beyond the text. Poststructural hermeneutics plays an interpretation of a text against itself. This becomes an

endless process of critique and deconstruction.

Gallagher (1992) points out that in contrast to moderate or contextual hermeneutics, the poststructural reader is skeptical about creative interpretations that establish communication with original meaning; rather it is believed that original meaning is unattainable and that the best we can do is to stretch the limits of language in order to break upon fresh insights and new understandings. For Derrida, for example, there is no original truth of being beyond language itself. Thus, poststructural hermeneutics aims at deconstructing the meaning of a text, not in order to analyze it or to reconstruct a different interpretation, but to displace traditional and conservative concepts like identity, meaning, authorship, unity, purpose, etc. The aim is not to establish a correct vision of the world or society, but to demonstrate that all visions are relative, contingent, emergent, and incomplete.

Critical Hermeneutics developed in the tradition of critical theorists and finds inspiration in Marx, Freud, Habermas, and the Frankfort school of social criticism. On the one hand, it is similar to poststructural hermeneutics to the extent that its social and political objectives are to deconstruct hegemonic power arrangements and create individual liberation from oppressive class structures. Critical hermeneutics deconstructs economic systems and social metanarratives by employing a critical interpretation of false consciousness in order to uncover the ideological nature of beliefs and values. The goal

is to promote distortion free communication and a liberating consensus. Gallagher (1992) contends that critical hermeneutics is like conservative philosophical hermeneutics to the extent that it promises objectivity in the eradication of false consciousness. Critical hermeneutics expects to accomplish--in politics, aesthetics, and psychology--an ideology free situation of consensus. Thus, an absolutely objective perspective can be attained if the right methods can be employed to escape our historical constraints. Deconstructionists would contend that critical hermeneutics shares the naive optimism of theological, conservative hermeneutics that language, through ideal communication, will deliver truth and engender significant non-linguistic emancipation and liberation.

We have now reviewed five approaches to hermeneutics. My proposal for a phenomenological aesthetic will seek to move beyond the traditional theological, conservative philosophical, and critical hermeneutics by proposing that subjectivity and aesthetics enhance the possibility for emancipation and understanding in the interpretive process.

Aesthetics and Hermeneutics

I was first introduced to hermeneutics as a theology student in the early 1970s. The conservative philosophical approach to hermeneutics dominated my studies. While I appreciated my studies and my professors tremendously, I always had an uneasy feeling that the philosophical tradition was incomplete. During the time of my studies, I also made extended visits to Christ in the Desert Monastery in Abiquiu, New Mexico, where I read theology extensively, pondered the mysteries of scriptures, and took long walks along the Chama River. It was on one such walk that I first encountered a famous resident of Abiquiu on the Ghost Ranch near the monastery, Georgia O'Keefe. O'Keefe was a recluse, but I did manage to see her painting the desert landscapes from a distance. One of my favorites is "Dry Waterfall Cliffs Above Abiquiu" which now hangs in the Cleveland Museum of Art. I have spent many hours with this painting, pondering the mysteries of the cosmos first encountered in Abiquiu with Georgia O'Keefe over 25 years ago. We each had subjective interpretations of this dessert location, and in each visit to this canvas new memories are created. I believe that the aesthetic experience is generative and full of understanding when knowledge and meaning are constructed in the hermeneutic circle--a circle that transcends linear time and physical space.

John Dewey in *Art as Experience* is instructive here. Dewey (1934b) writes about the significance of the arts, and concludes,

"In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man (sic) that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience" (p. 105). This is a phenomenology that is based on the assumption that we cannot speculate about what beings are in themselves. Rather, the emphasis should be placed on *possibility* and *becoming* as a goal of education, for human consciousness can never be static. Jean-Paul Sartre argues that human consciousness (being-for-itself) can never become a substance or an objective thing (being-in-itself), and this is why possibility must be the focus of educational inquiry. Hence, each new experience adds to the accumulated meaning of experience for each individual and sets the stage for present and future possibilities. While the present is conditioned by the past, every moment is also full of future possibilities for change and new directions. The aesthetic experience can inspire new personal realizations, as Dewey (1934b) explains:

> A work of art, no matter how old or classic is actually not just potentially, a work of art only when it lives in some individual experience. A piece of parchment, of marble, of canvas, it remains self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art it is re-created every time it is aesthetically experienced....The Parthenon, or whatever, is universal because it can continue to inspire new personal realizations in experience. (pp. 108-109)

Pablo Picasso (1971) has also described artistic creation in a

similar way:

> A picture is not thought out and settled beforehand. While it is being done it changes as one's thoughts change. And when it is finished it still goes on changing according to the state of mind of whoever is looking at it. A picture lives a life like a living creature, undergoing the changes imposed on us by our life from day, to day. This is natural enough, as the picture lives only through the man who is looking at it. (p. 268)

Picasso and Dewey reflect one of the important phenomenological dimensions of my proposal for aesthetics and hermeneutics: events find their meaning in subjective encounters where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed in every new situation. In this sense, a work of art truly exists only in the encounter. If locked in a darkened vault, a painting is simply an aggregate of materials. Art, like the curriculum, is the process of becoming and recreating in each new situation. Phenomenology seeks description of how the world is experienced by persons.

Returning to my encounter with the cliffs above Abiquiu, Georgia O'Keefe, and my meditations in the desert, I intuitively realized the need to ask different questions about interpretation. I was particularly struck by a text that I discovered in the monastery library, an event similar to the discovery of "hidden texts" in Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. I read a new translation of recently discovered Gnostic texts found

in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. I was overwhelmed by this Gnostic material. I had studied Gnostic heresy in theology class, but I had never read Gnostic texts.

Several months later I had the opportunity to take a course with the renowned American Biblical theologian and author of the Jerome Biblical Commentary, Raymond Brown. Brown was articulate, compassionate, and brilliant. I was mesmerized by his lectures. One day I had the courage to ask him about the Nag Hammadi Gnostic texts. I was concerned as to why these Gospels--particularly Thomas--had been excluded from the canon. I had outlined many parallels I had discovered in Thomas with parables and sayings of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. I was especially intrigued because John's Gospel, which was so different from the synoptic Gospels and had even received critical attention in the process of selecting the New Testament canon, was included but Thomas was excluded. I was surprised that this professor who had been so articulate in his hermeneutical exegesis of scripture seemed to dismiss my question primarily on the basis of magisterial canonicity.

Unwilling to be satisfied with this answer, I proposed a hypothetical situation. Suppose that another Nag Hammadi or Dead Sea discovery were to be made in the future, and texts were discovered that theologians and magisterium agreed were authentic letters of Paul. Suppose also that the letters unearthed were also internally verified in the canonical letters of Paul through references to other letters he had written. In light of such

universal hermeneutical verification, certainly these letters would be added to the canon, I insisted (hesitantly and respectfully as a 20 year old student!) Brown responded in the negative, insisting that the canon is closed.

I returned to the monastery frustrated. A significant shift in my education had occurred. It was at this time that my mother, an art instructor and painter, came to spend a week with me in the desert following the tragic death of my father. As we walked along the Chama river, we talked about life and death, painting, spirituality, and theology. My mother spent many hours in solitude painting the dry waterfall cliffs above Abiquiu. I had the opportunity to juxtapose my mother and Georgia O'Keefe, life and death, Thomas and Matthew, canonical and heretical scriptures. Twenty five years later my mother and I continue to ponder these issues. In 1995 she wrote the following poem about Georgia O'Keefe and the Abiquiu landscape:

> Far from Manhattan skies
> Scraped with girders,
> Pristine calla lilies and crimson
> Poppies cultivated on canvas,
> I have found my place with you --
> Craggy cathedrals beyond human influence.
> Before your mountains were, I am
> And I shall leave with them.

Our painting time together
Disappears then stays
Frozen into ice I lay upon
Waiting for the morning light
to reveal what came before and is now,
Compelling me, create what is to be.

Even the death of bones
Demands delivery of their pregnant past
As the moon rises above the pelvic void
Alive with cerulean blues
Precisely planned
As though the hand of God
Fashions re-incarnation.

Now I stand,
A moth pinned by walking stick
To this sacred ground

(Burke, 1996).

My mother, now a retired professor of design science from Arizona State University, has requested that her ashes be scattered along the Chama River at the Monastery of Christ in the Desert in Abiquiu when she dies. The aesthetic experience lives on, created and re-created in each re-telling and re-visiting. A

hermeneutic circle of standing and under-standing, re-living and re-die-recting. Such must be the educational experience we foster in our contemporary world.

The complexity of understanding aesthetic experiences is difficult for those of us living in a modern mechanistic society where phenomenological aesthetic experiences do not conform to the logic of positivism, behaviorism, rationalism, and structural analysis. However, in my phenomenological aesthetic vision multiplicity of understandings replaces binary hierarchies and subjectivity replaces pastiche. Here synthetical experiences can give meaning and sustenance to Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" where the individual is not subsumed nor imitated, but integrated within the context of the lived world experiences all around waiting to be discovered, uncovered, and shared in the hermeneutic circle.

The beginning of my personal journey to understand this phenomenological aesthetic perspective occurred unexpectedly in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City during a high school trip. Our teacher took us to the museum to view a retrospective exhibit of the history of art through the eyes of several painters from medieval times through abstract-expressionism. I walked hurriedly through the art of the ages with my high school friends, anxious to get to the end so that we could move on to our pizza lunch. As we made our way into the final gallery, a huge canvas covering an entire wall startled us. The canvas was filled with swirls of color, particles of glass

and dirt, random drippings from paint brushes, and splashes from buckets of paint. We all laughed at this mess, and we mused aloud why it would be included in a major art exhibit. We rushed to the turnstile to meet our chaperon for lunch. As I reached the turnstile, a magnetic pull from the painting caused me to freeze. I realized that I had to go back into the gallery and investigate this strange painting, so I asked my teacher to let me stay in the museum. He agreed, but my friends urged me to come out. The tug-of-war ended as I sent them ahead and returned to the painting.

I walked alone and stood face to face with myself before Jackson Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm*. The intensity of the emotions of this artist touched a nerve in my adolescent confusion. I sensed the pain of the artist's struggles and suffering which seemed to parallel my own inner turmoil. Pollock's frustration with social structures reverberated with my own indignation about the Vietnam War, racism, and social injustice. Jackson Pollock's battle with alcoholism leaped from the canvas and caused me to reflect on my own father's struggle with this disease. I did not "know" Jackson Pollock at the time, but I came to experience his emotions as I encountered *Autumn Rhythm*. Just as "knowing" in Biblical literature refers to intercourse, there was a bond of intimacy that intensified as I stood with Pollock's painting.

Hundreds of people must have come and gone while I spent an hour or more in the room. However, time stood still for me. I was not a painter; I had never formally studied art. I had never

heard of Jackson Pollock, but I became the artist through his painting as his journey and my journey were united in a synthetical moment. When I reluctantly left the museum and caught up with my friends, I could not explain the mysterious events that occurred as I stood before *Autumn Rhythm.*

Jackson Pollock continues to influence my life and my education. I experienced a phenomenological moment of revelation and personal understanding that, like the beauty and intensity of nature in autumn, defines my life. Studying the technical details of the abstract-expressionist style of painting or the biography of Jackson Pollock could never have replaced that synthetical moment in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. However, following my encounter with *Autumn Rhythm* I have devoured every book available on these topics. This demonstrates a central dimension of aesthetic inquiry in the curriculum: the experience of disturbance, perturbation, contemporaneousness, or synthetical moments will inspire students to read, to research, to explore, to learn, to meditate, and to expand their understanding of the initial experience. It will also ignite a passion for hermeneutical insights that can lead to justice and compassion.

Knowledge is not logically ordered and waiting to be discovered, rather it is constructed in experiences of the whole body and being. "The intellect may raise all kinds of questions--and it is perfectly right for it to do so--but to expect a final answer from the intellect is asking too much of it, for this is not in the nature of intellection. The answer lies deeply buried

under the bedrock of our being" (Suzuki, Fromm, and DeMartino, 1960, pp. 48-49). *Autumn Rhythm* did not provide answers to my intellect, rather it touched the bedrock of my being and initiated a search for meaning and understanding, not only about art history, abstract-expressionism, and Jackson Pollock, but most significantly about the purpose of life, the reason for suffering, the tragedy of alcoholism, and the relationship between inner confusion and turmoil. My visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, it turns out, was not simply a retrospective art lesson, it was a border crossing, a seminal moment, synthetical event--a phenomenological aesthetic experience--that initiated a lifelong journey into the realm of contemporary art and postmodern living. This experience created a context within which the future study of art has been appealing, satisfying, lifegiving, and educational.

This transformative pedagogy challenges the educational community to reevaluate the traditional understanding of the learning environment. The postmodern world demands awareness of the environment and openness to the deep ecology of leaning: "The forests speak out, the oceans beckon, the sky calls us forth, the plants want to share their story, the mind of the universe is open to all of us, the planet wants to instruct. Educators, through their methods and their content, can either open wide the doors to this wonder or narrow the doorways to offer only a partial view which they can then control" (LePage, 1987, p. 180). Andy LePage argues that participation in the

environment is far more educational than passive observation. Participation in new environments and expanded horizons provides students and teachers with insights into alternative strategies for living, and therefore expanded possibilities for the future. These possibilities, in turn, offer a vision of hope to people who otherwise would be unaware of alternatives. In this sense, aesthetic theories also inform social and political theories of education.

Attention to the alternatives that provide hope is called "wide-awakenness" by Maxine Greene as we saw at the beginning of this paper. Greene argues for a strong emphasis on arts and humanities in education to promote this wide-awakenness and self-understanding that emerges from synthetical moments. Greene turns to the poet Henry David Thoreau for inspiration. Greene (1978) writes, "Thoreau writes passionately about throwing off sleep. He talks about how few people are awake enough for a poetic or divine life. He asserts that to be awake is to be alive" (p. 162). Eisner (1993) writes:

> Knowledge is considered by most in our culture as something that one discovers, not something that one makes. Knowledge is out there waiting to be found, and the most useful tool for finding it is science. If there were greater appreciation for the extent to which knowledge is constructed--something made--there might be a greater likelihood that its aesthetic dimension would be appreciated. (p. 32)

Phenomenological and aesthetic understanding replaces the modern obsession with standardized interpretation, objective hermeneutics, predetermined investigative methodologies, and universal masternarratives that can be applied to knowledge acquisition.

Phenomenological aesthetic hermeneutics involve critical reflection. It is a kind of knowing called praxis: a knowing that becomes an opening to possibilities and empowerment. Greene (1978) calls it "a poem about one human being's self-formation, recaptured through a return (in inner time) to an original landscape, the place where it all began" (p. 15). This experience of returning is not only necessary for wide-awakenness, but also for autobiographical self-reflection. It even goes beyond the aesthetic encounters discussed above. The emphasis has shifted from the external to the internal and artists seek an inner experience that creates an interconnectedness. Otherwise, enthusiasm and hope will be lost. Without that awareness and that hope teachers find it unimaginably difficult to cope with the demands of children in the schools today. Like Horace Smith in Theodore Sizer's (1984) book *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, teachers will "neither have the time nor energy, nor inclination to urge their students to critical reflection: they themselves have suppressed the questions, and avoided backward looks" (p. 38).

This, then, is the implication of a phenomenological

aesthetics for hermeneutics in education: transformation and learning are stimulated by a sense of connectedness and future possibilities of what might be. Finally, Maxine Greene (1978) advises:

> I would lay stress upon talking together, upon the mutual exchange that expresses lives actually lived together, that forges commonalities. I would work for the kind of critical reflection that can be carried on by persons who are situated in the concreteness of the world, by persons equipped for interrogation, for problematization, and for hermeneutic interpretation of the culture--of the present and the past. (p. 107)

This can be accomplished: education flourishes in some places because of emphasis on this process. Once engaged in the journey, the traveler no longer remains isolated and separated from the dreams and visions which give sustenance for exploration and praxis. A transformative pedagogy is most clearly seen as the engagement of this journey by students and teachers who are confident that the consummation of education is liberation and synthesis without knowing the precise destination in advance.

References

Arons, S. (1983). *Compelling belief: The culture of American schooling.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Bernard, Hilly, & Slattery, Patrick. (1992). Quantum curriculum. Dayton Ohio: *JCT* Bergamo Conference. Unpublished paper.

Blacker, D. (1993, March). Education as the normative dimension of philosophical hermeneutics. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society in New Orleans, LA.

Bleicher, J. (1980). *Contemporary hermeneutics: hermeneutics as method, philosophy and critique.* New York: Routledge.

Benvenuto, B., & Kennedy, R. (1986). *The works of Jacques Lacan.* London: Free Press Association Books.

Bloch, E. (1986). *The principle of hope.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Bowers, Chet. A., & Flinders, David J. (1990). *Responsive teaching: An ecological approach to classroom patterns of language, culture, and thought.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Burke, P. (1995). Collected poems. Scottsdale, AZ: Unpublished Manuscript.

Dewey, J. (1934). *A common faith.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Dewey, J. (1934b). *Art as experience.* Milton, Balch, & Co.

Eisner, E. (1994). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs* (third edition). New York: Macmillan.

Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59 (3), pp. 297-324.

Fox, Matthew. (1992). *Sheer joy: Conversations with Thomas Aquinas on creation spirituality*. San Francisco: Harper.

Gadamer, H-G. (1960/1975). *Truth and method*. New York: Crossroads.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. (1976). *Philosophical hermeneutics* (David E. Linge, Ed. and Trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, & Derrida, Jacques. (1989). *Dialogue and deconstructionism: The Gadamer-Derrida encounter*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Gadamer, H-G. (1980). *Dialogue and dialectic: Eight hermeneutic studies on Plato*. [Trans. P. Smith]. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Gallagher, S. (1992). *Hermeneutics and education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Greene, M. (1978). *Landscapes of learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Habermas, Jurgen. (1970). *Knowledge and human interests.* Boston: Beacon.

Haggerson, N., & Bowman, A. (1992). *Informing educational policy and practice through interpretive inquiry.* Lancaster, PA: Technomic.

Hodge, Robert, & Kress, Gunter. (1988). *Social Semiotics.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Hudak, G. M. (1995). 'We are all related': The formation of the 'sound' identity in music making and schooling. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 16 (3), 297-315.

Jeanrond, Werner. (1988). Hermeneutics. In J. Komonchak, M. Collins, & D. Lane (Eds.), *The new dictionary of theology* (pp. 462-464). Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier.

Jencks, Charles. (1986). *What is post-modernism?* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Jencks, Charles. (Ed.). (1992). *The post-modern reader.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Kierkegaard, Soren. (1849). *The sickness unto death: A Christian psychological exposition for upbuilding and awakening* (H. V. Hong & E. H. Hong, Trans.). (1980). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press.

Kimball, S., & Garrison, J. (n.d.). *Hermeneutic listening* Unpublished abstract. Blacksburg, VA: VA Polytechnic Institute.

Langer, S. (1957). *Problems of art.* New York: Charles Scribner.

LePage, A. (1987). *Transforming education: The new 3 r's.* Oakland: Oakmore House.

Misgeld, D. & Graeme, N. (1992). *Hans-Georg Gadamer on education, poetry, and history: Applied hermeneutics.* [Trans. L. Schmidt and M Reuss]. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Morris, M., & Slattery. P. (1995, September). Simone deBeauvoir and postmodern ambiguity. Unpublished paper presented at the JCT conference in Monteagle, TN.

Nietzsche, F. (1968). *The birth of tragedy.* In W. Kaufmann (Trans. and Ed.), *Basic writings of Nietzsche* (3rd ed.). New York: Modern Library.

Picasso, Pablo. (1971). Conversations. In H. B. Chipps (Ed.), *Theories of modern art: A source book of artists and critics,* (p. 268). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pinar, W. F, Reynolds, W. M., Slattery, P., & Taubman, P. M. (1995). *Understanding curriculum.* New York: Peter Lang.

Reynolds, W. M. (1989). *Reading curriculum theory: The development of a new hermeneutic.* New York; Peter Lang.

Ricouer, Paul. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences.* J. Thompson (Trans. and Ed.). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, J. M. (Ed.). (1977). *The Nag Hammadi Library*. San Francisco: Harper and Row.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. (1959). *Course in general linguistics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. (1974). *Course in general linguistics*. J. Culler (Ed.), and W. Baskin (Trans.). London: Falmer.

Sizer, T. (1984). *Horace's compromise: The dilemma of the American high school*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Slattery, P. (1995). *Curriculum development in the postmodern era*. New York: Garland.

_____. (1995b). The hermeneutic circle and postmodern community. In Patrick Slattery, *Curriculum development in the postmodern era* (pp. 103-120). New York: Garland.

Smith, D. G. (1991). Hermeneutic inquiry: The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text. In E. Short (Ed.), *Forms of curriculum inquiry* (pp. 187-209). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Suzuki, D. T., Fromm, E., & DeMartino, R. (1960). *Zen Buddhism and psychoanalysis*. New York: Grove.

van Manen, Max. (1986). *The tone of teaching*. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Scholastic-Tab.

van Manen, Max. (1988). The relationship between research and pedagogy. In William F. Pinar (Ed.), *Contemporary curriculum discourses* (pp. 427-452). Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch, Scarisbrick.

van Manen, Max. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, Ontario: Althouse Press.

van Manen, Max. (1993). *The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Whitehead, Alfred North. (1929). *Aims of education*. New York: The Free Press, Macmillan.

Whitehead, Alfred North. (1933). *Adventure of ideas*. New York: Macmillan.